

into his own bally pockets to foot the difference."

"By Jove! I must speak to the governor about it," ingeniously exclaimed the son. "With so many large interests, I fancy he has to leave this sort of thing to an understrapper. He won't like it, I'm sure."

"We don't like it," frankly confessed Captain Sackett. "It is hard to get men to stay in these ships. They have the name of starving their crews."

"How absurd!" and the young man began to pace the deck. "Sir James would be shocked. If you only knew him! He is the most open-handed, considerate old boy in Liverpool,—always founding or endowing something or other. And in his own home—why, he can never do enough for his people."

The skipper withstood the provocation to say more. It was hopeless to try to make the son understand that the Sir James Babb Norcross he knew was not the man his shipmasters cursed behind his back.

But in the Captain's silent scrutiny Hayden Norcross detected something like pity. He colored and spoke sharply.

"You think my father is responsible for this outrageous provender! I should say you owe me an apology."

"I can't quite fathom why," gravely replied Captain Sackett. "I have accused nobody. However, I like to see a man stand up for his dad. It shows a proper spirit."

THIS was the nearest they came to an issue until the Chilton Grange ran into a succession of gales, and it ceased to be a holiday lark of a voyage. Under lowering skies, over a sea gray and upheaved, she crept sluggishly eastward, her speed falling off day by day. It had not been expected that at this season of the year she would have to struggle against shouting head winds and thundering combers. June was presumed to be a halcyon month.

The Atlantic pounded the laboring steamer with gigantic blows, and across the well-deck the waves hissed in frothing green floods. The crew became spent and bruised and disheartened. Sleep and rest were denied them. They damned the ship and the sea, crawling about in wet clothes, clinging to life-lines and stanchions, or climbing from the fire-room to ease their burns and fill their tortured lungs with cool air.

The bonds of discipline had held them silent as long as luck favored the voyage. Now Hayden Norcross heard them call his father names to curdle one's blood. And as the weather turned even more menacing they yelled jeeringly at him when the officers were not present to check them.

Their derisive gratification because he was in the same boat with them made him wince and shiver. He tried to piece together the wind-blown fragments of what they said. His smooth pink cheek was a shade paler and his eyes were troubled as he shouted in Captain Sackett's ear:

"I can't stand much more from those filthy blackguards. Can't you put a stop to it? What are they jawing about? Am I a sort of Jonah? You might think this ship was a floating coffin when she left New York."

"Perhaps she was!" roared Captain Sackett as he watched a huge sea tumble over the bows while the Chilton Grange quivered and groaned in every plate and beam.

He looked wrinkled and old as he stood braced on the bridge in his dripping oilskins.

"I tried to keep you out of it," he added. "I said all I could, all I was obliged to. But you had to play this game with me. And by what the barometer tells me God Almighty may take a hand in it before sundown!"

His impassioned earnestness bewildered Hayden Norcross, who had not dreamed of danger. With the superb egotism of his years and station he believed it impossible that disaster could befall when he was on board. The tumult of wind and sea was terrifying; but what genuinely frightened him was the glimpse of some mystery, sinister and tragic, that had been purposely withheld from his

That would be Captain Nelson Sackett. A capable master, but inclined to borrow trouble."

He remained seated as the woman entered, hesitant, abashed, her cheek brightly flushed. It was an immensely audacious enterprise for her to thrust herself upon the notice of Sir James Babb Norcross. In her hand was a letter, folded and concealed, which she did not expect to disclose; but it gave her courage, and was the reason she had waited so patiently.

The shipowner graciously indicated a chair; but she preferred to stand. The sight of him somehow braced her resolution. Her shapely figure was held erect, the poise of her head was challenging, and her breath no longer fluttered between parted lips.

"Mrs. Sackett? I have not had the pleasure of meeting you; although your husband has been for many years in my employ," sonorously declaimed Sir James Norcross.

"I am Judith Sackett," she answered, regarding him from beneath black, level brows.

Her voice trembled a little; but she controlled it as she went on to say: "I must ask your pardon for putting you to the trouble of seeing me; but I am beside myself with worry, and your clerks could give me no proper information,—it wasn't sufficient to make my mind easy—"

Sir James stirred in his chair with an air of disquietude and found himself avoiding the gaze of Judith Sackett. He lumbered to his feet as he exclaimed: "You are agitated, my dear woman. I beg of you to be seated. I am wholly at your service."

As though she heard him not, Judith Sackett nervously twisted the letter in her fingers and moved to a window where she leaned against the ledge. Toward the beefy, pompous shipping magnate she felt a vague sense of physical repulsion. She wished him to keep his distance.

"I came to ask if the Chilton Grange had been reported since she sailed from New York," the woman explained. "They told me in the other room that she had not been spoken."

"Which was quite correct, Mrs. Sackett," pleasantly replied Sir James. "But there is not the slightest ground for alarm. Our smaller ships, of the Chilton Grange class, are not yet equipped with wireless. It sometimes happens that a steamer makes the Atlantic passage without being once spoken. The Chilton Grange has been at sea only ten days. I am surprised that you should feel at all concerned about her."

"I am always anxious, when my husband is afloat," said Judith Sackett. "It is the cross that we wives of seafaring men must bear. What I wish to beg of you is that you will surely send word to my house whenever the steamer is heard from. If I leave it to a clerk, he may forget or delay it. If you command it, I can depend upon getting the news. It will be the greatest favor in the world to me and my little boy."

SIR JAMES coughed, fumbled with the papers on his desk, and demanded: "What is there about this particular voyage to make you feel alarmed? A summer passage in a stanch, well-found steamer with an experienced master—why, I should not mind being along myself!"

"I have had bad dreams, dreadful dreams," she evasively returned. "A woman weaves strange fancies when her man is far away. I am not the hysterical

sort; but I feel things, and they come true. You will promise to let me know? I have been tracing the voyage with a pencil on an old chart, setting down every day an average run for the Chilton Grange. She must be in midocean by now. Ships should be passing her on the eastbound track. Is it foolish to ask them to look for her?"

At last her restless mood seemed to have communicated itself to the portly Sir James. He flung out his arm in a jerky, emphatic gesture as he affirmed:

"But, my dear Mrs. Sackett, the vessel is not overdue. She is jogging along at eight or nine knots, with a voyage of three thousand miles to make. And I have the greatest confidence in your husband. I shall be glad, however, to comply with your request. The office has your address. I am at a loss to understand your fears. If they did not cause you so much real distress, I should be inclined to laugh at them, upon my word! Captain Sackett is as safe in the Chilton Grange as though he were on dry land. Have you been having any trouble with your nerves that might account for this?"

Judith Sackett was no longer able to dissemble her contempt. It blazed in her dark eyes and curled her red lip. Until now she had watchfully held her speech under restraint lest she might jeopardize her husband's interests with his employer. But the monstrous hypocrisy of Sir James Babb Norcross made her throw discretion to the winds.

He was crassly lying to her, and she knew it.

SMOOTHING out the crumpled letter in her hand, she moved closer to the desk.

"And so you would not mind being along with Captain Sackett for this voyage in the Chilton Grange?" she cried, mocking and tempestuous. "It will go hard with him, no doubt, if he comes through safe, after I tell you the truth to your face. But can I listen to the cruel nonsense of an owner who holds sailors' lives and sailors' widows so cheap?"

Sir James looked amazed. His florid features became mottled with righteous indignation. He was about to ring for his secretary and have the woman removed; but she confronted him, beautiful and fearless, and read aloud the message from Captain Nelson Sackett as he had written it to her in his cabin just before sailing from New York:

I expected to stay here longer for repairs in drydock; but Sir James Babb Norcross tells me by cable to proceed at once. I mailed a report to him as soon as we came in from Rio. The vessel has strained herself forward, and we had to keep the pumps going. There is eight feet of water in the forepeak now, and we can't seem to gain on it much. The reason why the owner orders me to wait and go into drydock in Liverpool is that the job will cost him four or five hundred pounds less than if I have it done in New York. With fair weather the Chilton Grange will be able to make the passage; although it will be slow—and you must not worry.

The owner takes no risk on her; for the steamer is well insured, and he is going in for bigger ships which are more profitable to run. I might ask Lloyd's agent in New York what he thought of starting across the Western Ocean with eight feet of water in the forepeak and the pumps unable to clear it. He would order the vessel into drydock or cancel the insurance; but I can't afford to do it. Sir James Babb Norcross would give me the sack and blacklist me in English ports. A shipmaster has to take things as he finds them in these days.

Judith Sackett's voice faltered and died. She stood waiting for Sir James to answer the damning indictment. Her words had been like the tolling of a bell. Their intonations conveyed her belief that the Chilton Grange would never see port again, as though her dreams of disaster had been prompted by means more subtle and mysterious than wireless telegraphy.

At this moment the great man's secretary entered hastily, a packet of letters in his hand.

"The American mail, Sir James," said he. "And you will be delighted, I'm sure,



"I am Judith Sackett," she said. Her voice trembled a little. "I must ask your pardon for putting you to the trouble of seeing me; but I am beside myself with worry."

knowledge. The Captain and the crew gave him the impression that the ship had been foredoomed.

A WOMAN waited patiently in a long, long aisle of desks at which spruce clerks were busied with bills of lading, manifests, and accounts. Through the nearest window she saw the crowded waterfront of Liverpool and the jostling traffic of the Mersey. She was waiting in the hope of a brief interview with Sir James Babb Norcross. Handsome she was even when anxiety had made her haggard.

Sir James had many other matters far more important to occupy this valuable morning. His secretary explained this to the woman; but her persistence was unshaken.

At length the great man was informed that the wife of one of his shipmasters could not be got rid of. She was very quiet and decent about it. Perhaps a word or two would satisfy her. Sympathy for femininity in distress throbbled beneath the expansive white waistcoat of Sir James Babb Norcross. Caressing his neat gray whiskers, he blandly told the secretary:

"You may admit her. I can spare five minutes. Her husband commands one of my vessels? Ah, what name?"

"The Chilton Grange, she says, sir. The steamer left New York ten days ago."

Sir James pursed his lips, and something like a scowl shadowed his massive features. The annoyance was momentary, however, and his mellow geniality reasserted itself as he said:

"The Chilton Grange? Let me see.